

Environmental policy has a lasting effect on succeeding generations. The risk of causing irreparable damage is high. These policies must be developed with the goal of balancing the interests of labor, industry, and the environment, not with the goal of increasing timber sales.

It is amazing that the greatest conservation President in the history of our country was a Republican, President Theodore Roosevelt, while we are now seeing the greatest anti-environmental President in another Republican, George Bush.

Mr. Speaker, the former poet laureate of Colorado and singer/songwriter John Denver said, "To the mountains I confess there; to the rivers I will be strong; to the forests, I find peace there; to the wild country I belong."

NO ACCOUNTING FOR WASTE, FRAUD, AND ABUSE IN GOVERNMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, as we begin our debate in our committees on reforming Medicare, one of the issues that will be highlighted is the waste, fraud and abuse that has plagued this program for decades. But this Federally-mandated managed program is not the only source of wasteful spending in waste, fraud and abuse. Frankly, the entire government endures this rampant problem also.

In March of this year, GAO submitted its report on the United States government's consolidated financial statement for fiscal year 2001 and 2002. Not surprisingly, GAO could not express its opinion on these statements due to "material weaknesses in internal control and in accounting and reporting."

It is the accounting and reporting that particularly appalls me. In the past 2 years, we have seen what happens with poor accounting and reporting in the corporate world, but it appears that the accounting irregularities continue to run rampant in the Federal Government as well. These irregularities and lack of internal controls result in "hampering the Federal Government's ability to accurately report assets, liabilities and costs."

In addition, such problems prevent accurate reporting of the cost and performance of certain Federal programs. That is, we cannot even determine what our government owns, what it accurately spends each year. GAO goes so far as to state that as a result of these material deficiencies, that the amounts reported in the consolidated financial statements "may not be reliable."

So if a person wanted to see what the consolidated financial statements of a particular agency that reported, they might as well take a scientific wild

guess, because the agency charged with examining the accounting statements of the Federal Government cannot even express an opinion because record-keeping and controls are so shoddy. Yet, we ask the private sector to keep accurate records, and if they do not, they are held accountable.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot even accurately state how much waste, fraud and abuse occurs in this Federal Government. Conservative estimates range at 20 billion plus. The government penalizes private companies for poor accounting, but when a Federal agency cannot account for billions that it has spent, what do we do? We give them an increased appropriations for the following year. We should not do this without strict accounting of these Federal agencies.

The President issued his Management Agenda designed to emphasize that clean financial records are key to a "well managed organization." I applaud the President's efforts in this area as it is a daunting task to reform such a bureaucratic beast. The government requires its citizens every year to pay an ever-increasing burden in Federal taxes and users fees for expanding Federal programs. The least we could do is to accurately report how the money is spent.

We must do this in Congress, put in place accounting procedures so we can determine what the government owns, what it spends; and then and only then can we determine where the waste, fraud and abuse is and save, ultimately, the hard-earned money of the taxpayers.

AMERICA IS WAITING FOR AN ANSWER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter by the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) to Condoleezza Rice, the Security Advisor to the President, because it contains some questions I think are important.

The other night I was on Crossfire, and Robert Novak asked me whether I thought it would be a good thing or a bad thing if weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. The show moved on before I could answer, but it was an interesting question. I think what he was getting at is whether I would feel better if I knew the President were right all along and that there were huge stockpiles of anthrax and nerve gas and missiles armed with bioweapons ready to be launched 45 minutes and a latterday Manhattan Project hidden under a stadium somewhere.

He was really asking if I would feel better knowing that I had not been misled or if I were rather nothing were

found so I could gloat over having been right when I said in September that I thought indeed the President would mislead the American people on the way to Iraq.

Of course, the answer is that I hope that no weapons are there to be found. I hope we are never in danger and that we were not in danger and that our troops were never in danger, and that Saddam Hussein, despite his aspirations, was not on his way of becoming the Saladin of the 21st century. Who would not prefer a world with fewer weapons in the hands of dictators? And if there were weapons, all Americans want them found and destroyed.

The President himself seems to have retreated from the claim that the U.S. was in imminent danger from the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Now he is speaking of existence of a weapons program, not of armed missiles and gallons of nerve gas.

Mr. Speaker, 11 young Americans have died in Iraq in the past 15 days. Fifty have died since the President declared the war over. A total of 180 Americans and 45 coalition troops have died. What does it mean that 180 young Americans have died in Iraq? Did they die to bring democracy to someone else's country or to stop Saddam Hussein's terrible human rights abuses?

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that Hussein is gone, and I believe that nearly all Iraqis are glad that he's gone. But I do not think that the young Americans who died in Iraq signed up to fight against tyranny in general. They signed up to protect this country and our country, their own country.

In light of this where do we go? If this were still the Clinton administration, there would be a highly publicized investigation coming out of every committee in this House, including Small Business and Agriculture. There would be calls for special prosecutors, for resignation, for impeachment.

President Bush puts great store in personal responsibility, and I believe the time is long past for the President to take responsibility and level with the American people. Did the President believe that Iraq was so likely to pose a danger in the future that it was okay to play fast and loose with the Congress, the U.N. and the American people to get approval to go to war?

Was the President misled by bad intelligence? Was he misled by advisors who had prejudged the facts, or was there solid, credible intelligence that just unaccountably turned up to be accurate? We need to know.

If the President's information was bad, we need to know what steps are being taken to dismiss those who provided and vouched for it. If the President decided that future dangers were so great that misleading us about the present danger was warranted, we need him to take responsibility for that decision. We need the President to explain to us and to the world why 180 young Americans are dead and why U.S. credibility is eroding all over the